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PSB D-24  
October 27, 1952

PSYCHOLOGICAL STRATEGY BOARD

Washington 25, D. C.

PROGRAM OF  
PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPARATION FOR STALIN'S PASSING FROM POWER

For approval of the Board

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1. National policy calls for placing "maximum strain on the Soviet structure of power," reducing Soviet power, and bringing about "a basic change in the conduct of international relations by the government in power in Russia" (NSC 20/4, para. 19 a and b, 21 a; cf. NSC 10/5, para. 1 a).
2. One of the most favorable occasions for furthering these objectives may be Stalin's passing from power. This event, however, has important relations to practically every aspect of the Soviet problem. It may touch off a split in the top leadership. It may also lead to the crystallization of present dissatisfactions among various groups in the Soviet population which feel themselves discriminated against.
3. This paper is also relevant to strains that may emerge before Stalin has fully passed from power. For example, since rivalries must be presumed to exist already in the top leadership and Stalin's control may be relaxing as he grows older, it is conceivable that the death of one of the principal aspirants to the succession might upset some delicate equilibrium and precipitate a crisis, arising perhaps out of Stalin's efforts to restore balance. It is also conceivable, though unlikely, that Stalin's death may be concealed, both from us and from the people, for some time after the event.
4. There is only a chance, not a certainty, that conflicts related to Stalin's passing from power will bring major changes, and if they do the changes need not be favorable to U.S. interests. The successor regime may be worse than Stalin's, and among remoter possibilities lies general war as well as general collapse. In any case, those conflicts have such weighty potentialities that they call for active preparation on our part. It may also be possible to pave the way, to a modest extent, for their eruption in desirable forms.

5. There are many uncertainties in this field, but three points stand out as landmarks: (1) Stalin must die sometime; (2) strains must be presumed to exist between individuals and groups closely connected with the problem of succession, even if the problem as such is never mentioned; (3) apart from strains now directly connected with the problem of succession, there is evidence of group dissatisfaction throughout the population of the Soviet Union.

Recommendations

6. In the psychological field, preparatory work should be five-fold:

- a. Existing information and intelligence should be inventoried, all that is likely to be additionally useful collected, and the results brought to bear on factors likely to influence strains in the top leadership and their modes of expression. Consideration should be given to using certain

other reactions which may throw further light on this subject.

- b. In the light of such insight and within the context of the more probable patterns of future events in general, the principal ways in which important conflicts might develop should be analyzed and corresponding psychological courses of action sketched, as a repeated staff exercise designed to make possible prompt and judicious decisions when the time comes. Since Stalin may die any time, this task should not be delayed for the completion of further work under 6 a above.

- c. To avoid uncoordinated action in case of sudden death, an agreed Government position should be prepared at once, as a basis for stand-by instructions for the period immediately following this contingency.

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- d. Ways of enhancing top-level conflicts in a useful manner before Stalin's passing should be continuously studied, developed if promising, and employed when considered feasible and desirable by the members of PSB. This task should envisage not only conflicts as such but also those contributory factors which might eventually shape events in directions favorable to U.S. interests. Particular emphasis should be put upon exploring the possibility of developing psychological operations aimed at influencing the minds of top-level Soviet leaders in such a manner as to enhance decisively present or potential conflicts among them.
- e. In connection with other programs oriented toward the objectives cited in paragraph 1, exploitation of salient vulnerabilities in the Soviet or Orbit control apparatus should be integrated with any operations developed under paragraph 6 d relating to the problem of succession in order to (1) feed probable strains at the top or make it easier for them to spread out from there eventually, and (2) make use of hopes and anxieties which cluster around the points mentioned in paragraph 5.

7. Each Member Agency and the Director of PSB is requested to name one staff member as principal point of contact concerning the work outlined in paragraph 6.

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